

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Whatever happened to Régulation theory? The Régulation approach and local government revisited

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This article contributes to an ongoing debate about the causal source of policy change by considering whether the Régulation approach, which has been largely discarded since the 1990s, can help to explain change in economic development policies at the level of local government in the UK. First, the ‘decline’ of the approach is explained by interviewing key exponents of the approach from the 1990s. Second, the approach is applied to a narrative of local economic policy in the City of York 1980–2006. In applying the Régulation approach, a number of problems are encountered. Chiefly, as a macro-approach, it lacks the finer tools to be able to explain all aspects of local change. Moreover, the approach is open to the charge of over-determinism by over-privileging the role of economic crisis in change. In the case of York, the cause of change has not been any crisis of Fordism but instead an acceptance of neo-liberalism in national and international spheres of governance, the inevitability of which may be overstated by exponents of the crisis of Fordism. However, the application of the Régulation approach to the case study reaffirms the importance of broader hegemonic political struggles and economic change to the study of local institutions, and the insights that more holistic analysis can make to the study of institutional change. Without some linkage to the broader economic and political hegemonic struggles, that the Régulation approach provides, meso-level theories are inherently wanting. The approach may be worth revisiting in the light of the new crisis of capitalism.

Keywords: Régulation theory; new institutionalism; local government; economic policy; policy change; local economic development

Introduction

The extent to which policies and political institutions are characterised by continuity or change is a key debate within the public administration and political science literature. A broad point of consensus amongst some new institutionalists has been to note the enduring nature of institutions. For example, Pierson (1994) argued with respect to welfare provision that once policies become entrenched they create organised groups that will protect their interests and therefore the institutions that created these. A number of authors however have increasingly pinpointed how new institutionalism, as a theoretical perspective, has problems explaining change when it does occur. Change is often seen as exogenous to the model and often explained through terms such as ‘punctuated equilibrium’ or ‘critical junctures’ (Krasner 1988, Baumgartner and Jones 1991). As Steinmo *et al.* (1992, p. 15) comment: ‘institutions

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explain everything until they explain nothing. Institutions are an independent variable and explain political outcomes in periods of stability, but when they break down, they become the dependent variable . . . the logic of the argument is reversed from “institutions shape politics” to “Politics shape institutions””. There are those that pinpoint some valuable new institutionalist work on change (Davies 2004), but it is perhaps uncontroversial to claim that there is an ongoing and unresolved debate about the causes of change in public administration and the ability of the new institutionalist literature to explain it.

So what can account for change? This paper considers this by examining a case study of change in economic development policy in local government in York from 1980–2006. This period witnessed a rapid transformation in which policy evolved from being virtually non-existent in 1980 to encompassing a complex range of policy mechanisms and strategies by the 2000s aimed largely at promoting science industries. More precisely this paper considers whether the Régulation approach can provide any useful insights into the case study and policy change more generally. This was a form of neo-Marxism which sought to examine the relationship between the reform of states in developed capitalist democracies and changes in the nature of capitalism underlying these socio-political institutions (Boyer and Saillard 2002a). Such an approach could be useful since it is designed to theorise the relationship between institutions at multiple levels (economic, political and social) to enable a more holistic model of analysis and overcome the problem in some analysis of seeing change purely as an exogenous force. By the 1990s, the approach had been proclaimed to ‘have most effectively captured the broad complexity of the changes that are occurring in the system of local governance’ (Stoker and Mossberger 1995, p. 210). Since then the Régulation approach has fallen from the academic limelight in recent years, without much explanation. It is therefore worth considering what contribution the approach can still make, if any.

The claim of the article is that the approach has some fundamental problems explaining change which perhaps explains its disappearance from the limelight. Foremost, as a macro-approach it lacks the finer tools to be able to explain all aspects of local change. Moreover, the approach is open to the charge of over-determinism by over-privileging the role of economic crisis in change. In the case of York, the cause of change has not been any crisis of Fordism but instead an acceptance of neo-liberalism in national and international spheres of governance, the inevitability of which may be overstated by exponents of the crisis of Fordism. Those within the approach who emphasise the importance of the ‘crisis of Fordism’ in generating change may be overstating the importance of structure or the actual structures in questions. The characterisation of the alleged ‘crisis of Fordism’ do not appear to be present in York, at least. Instead, the casual force of change has been the acceptance of neo-liberal economic policy in national and international spheres of governance which has impacted York in the form of increased international competition that has drawn firms away from York and the privatisation of the railway industry by the Conservative government. Both of these have caused considerable job losses and led the local state to take action.

However, the application of the Régulation approach to the case study affirms the importance of broader hegemonic political struggles to the study of local government and institutions, and the insights that more holistic analysis can make to the study of institutional change. Policy change in York cannot be explained *without* an appreciation of the broader context of change, which is often not present in many

approaches to policy change. Thus, economic development policy in local government, or any other micro-policy area, cannot be compartmentalised and separated away from the effects of changes in macro-level institutions or macro-theories of policy analysis. The acceptance of this structure and agency is not a 'truism' since structure is not accepted by all since theories of the policy process and the way in which structures impose themselves on agents is an important source of debate. However, while the Régulation approach appears to be superficially useful at integrating external change into the analysis, any macro-approach would need to be complemented by micro-theories to explain the particular dynamics of local change. The article begins by outlining the origins and claims of the Régulation approach and how it has been applied to local government reform by Stoker and Mossberger (1995). Following this a brief chronology of reform in York is outlined, before the factors that contributed towards change are discussed at the local, national and international level.

The rise and fall of the Régulation approach

In 1995, when the British Research Council, the ESRC, initiated a research programme on local governance, Régulation theory was the chosen theoretical model for understanding change. This reflected a growing interest in the approach which had grown from the late 1970s by a range of theorists, but particularly Bob Jessop and Gerry Stoker. Jessop developed an interest in the regulation approach in the late 1970s and began incorporating it into his work in the 1980s, most notably from 1982 onwards, after the publication of *The capitalist state* (1982) in the hope of finding an approach to the economy that was compatible with his approach to the state (private email, 25 January 2008). For him and others, the attraction of the Régulation approach was that it provided a meta-narrative within which sense could be made of change across a broad range of fields, and its influence was evident in Jessop's co-authored text *Thatcherism: a tale of two nations* (Jessop *et al.* 1988) and Andrew Gamble's *Strong economy, free state* (1994). Jessop noted that it was widely used in economic sociology, industrial relations, new public management, geography, etc. Scholars of local government and local governance came to it comparatively late (private email, 25 January 2008).

Gerry Stoker was among the first scholars to directly apply the approach to local government (Stoker 1990). He developed an interest in macro-level explanation while at the University of Birmingham amongst a group of colleagues working on the left. In 1995, Stoker published an important paper with Karen Mossberger developing a typology of local response to the challenges of the crisis of Fordism, theorised by the Régulation approach (Stoker and Mossberger 1995). The Régulation approach featured heavily in the 1995 British Research Council programme on local governance and further work was done by, amongst others, Painter and Goodwin (1993, 2000). The approach was widely accepted as being internationally significant.

Jessop continued to do further work on the Régulation approach: however, after mid-1990s it began to drift from the limelight. Stoker himself did no further work on the approach:

I think that my intellectual explanation of what went wrong was that people found that, it offered answers and arguments at a sort of macro-level but that when it came to actually explain the way that the state was responding or what it was doing, people started to get into more meso-levels of theory.

Indeed, the *Régulation* approach appears to have been lost in the tide of literature that quickly emerged on governance. While the premise of the governance literature is essentially contested, it became an ‘organising perspective’ for describing and for searching for new methods of governance and their normative and empirical effects on government and society. According to Rhodes, for example, there was

a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule; or the new method by which society is governed (Rhodes 1996, pp. 652–653).

This reflected a changing the context of:

Economic development and the associated globalization of the world economy; More demanding and sophisticated consumers, taxpayers and citizens; Technological developments particularly around the management and transmission of information; [and] The overarching diversity and complexity of society (Stoker 2006, p. 2).

The purpose of this paper is not to dismiss the governance literature, but to consider whether the *Régulation* approach might make some contribution to this literature: does it still provide a useful meta-narrative for understanding changing methods of governance? Could the *Régulation* approach still make some important contribution to understanding local governance?¹

This article now outlines the approach in general, before considering the specific applications made by Stoker and Mossberger. It then proceeds to a case study of York. It argues that without some understanding of macro-economic change and political struggle it is not possible to understand policy change. As such it may remain useful in contributing any explanation changing methods of governance at the local, national or international level; especially if it is combined usefully with meso-level theories of change.

The *Régulation* approach

In many senses, the *Régulation* approach is a methodology and analytical framework rather than a theory. Yet there are a number of core defining features which make it unique as a theory of the policy process. First, unlike many approaches, it is premised on a critical realist ontology and epistemology (McAnulla 2006). The focus is to understand the generative structures and mechanisms that shape the actual movement of social forces, accepting that such structures might not be observable and that there might be a separation of appearance and reality (Sayer 1992). The lack of recognition given to the role of these causal sources of policy change by many researchers is methodologically problematic. Second, the approach is essentially premised on the Marxist critique of neo-classical economic theory. Capitalism is not a rational socio-legal system with a long-run self-sustaining equilibrium: it is crisis-prone. The approach highlights the major ruptures and structural shifts that occur during capital accumulation and the antagonistic nature of social relations.

However, the third feature is that the approach challenges classical Marxism, and in particular Marx’s theory of economic crisis, by suggesting that it underplayed the extent to which social *régulation* could stabilise capitalism. It emphasises the ability of ‘temporal spatial fixes’ to regulate capitalism. While agreeing that capitalism is a fundamentally crisis-ridden system, the approach thus ‘focuses on the changing combinations of economic and extra-economic institution and practices that help to

secure...a certain stability and predictability in accumulation – despite the fundamental contradictions and conflicts generated’ (Jessop 2001). It therefore identifies a role for institutions and social agency in transforming social structures. It considers how capitalist development and crisis is mediated through particular institutions and practices and thus avoids functionalism or over-determinism. The movement from one regime of accumulation is always contingent, rather than automatic. For Boyer, the *Régulation* approach presents itself as a research programme of gathering together historical studies, international comparisons and macro-economic tests with the goal of identifying some typical configurations of modes of development and their crises.

When these crisis tendencies are mitigated, ‘*régulation*’ is said to occur. As Boyer points out, this concept of *régulation* is crucial to the entire approach but is often misunderstood by the Anglophone world (Boyer and Saillard 2002a). Rather than meaning ‘regulation’ in the English sense of the word (which would be ‘*réglementation*’ in French) *régulation* involves:

The analysis of the way in which transformations of social relations create new economic and non-economic forms, organised in structures that reproduce a determining structure, the mode of production (Aglietta 2002).

The successful *régulation* of capitalism involves the moulding of the economy into an effective ‘*regime of accumulation*.’ These are temporary periods of sustained economic growth that are rare and historically and spatially specific. Importantly the success of the regime requires effective *régulation* across social, economic and political institutions which must combine to create conditions of stability and economic growth. However because capitalism is a crisis and conflict-riddled system regimes of accumulation are also accompanied by a *mode of régulation* which consist of all the political and socio-cultural institutions and practices that help to secure the accumulation regime. Policy continuity can be expected across many elements of the polity while a successful regime of accumulation is in place. A *mode of development* is generated at ‘the conjunction of an accumulation regime and a type of *régulation*’ (Boyer and Saillard 2002c, p. 341).

Any regime of accumulation will be defined by particular *institutional forms*. These are the ‘specific configuration of social relations for any given era of geographical location.’ Different configurations of these will be present in each accumulation regime. The five fundamental institutional forms on which the *Régulation* approach focuses are: the forms of monetary constraint; the configurations of wage–labour nexus; the forms of competition; the methods of insertion into the international regime; and the forms of the state.

Fordism and post-Fordism as accumulation regimes

Perhaps the mostly widely-known application of *Régulation* theory has been the identification by some authors of the particular accumulation regimes of ‘Fordism’ and ‘post-Fordism’, commonly in the Anglo-American context. The identification of these has become synonymous with *régulation* theory, although should not be since not all theorists accept the empirical identification of these regimes (Meegan 1988, Sayer 1990)². In addition, some analysts have questioned whether a post-Fordist regime ever emerged since a successful accumulation regime requires the functional

solving of the crisis of Fordism and generation of new coherent regulative structures. Endemic regulative problems are found in case studies of Sunderland, South-West Wales and Berkshire (Painter and Goodwin 2000) and Australia (Broomhill 1998), which thus question the viability of the post-Fordist regime, at the local level.

However proponents maintained that the movement from a 'Fordist' to a post-Fordist regime was empirically identifiable in a number of developed capitalist states, including Britain. The Fordist regime, which was set up following WWII, was premised on Taylorist production methods which maximised profit via long-term capital investment economies of scale under conditions of monopolistic competition. This was accompanied with a mode of *régulation* which included a welfare state, collective bargaining and Keynesian Demand management under an international system of fixed exchanges. These provided the mechanism to ensure that workers had sufficient money to ensure that consumption rates were maintained within the system and prevent the crisis of under-consumption that had occurred during the interwar period and led the previous regime of accumulation to have gone into crisis (Aglietta 1979).

Fordism was said to have gone into crisis itself by the mid-1970s, creating the space for the evolution of a new regime, with 'Thatcherism' often said to have been the initial British response (Hall and Jacques 1983, Jessop *et al.* 1988, Gamble 1994). Within this new, 'post-Fordist' regime, economic growth is premised on flexible labour processes based on flexible production routines. New micro-electronic ICT systems were seen as key to this as they were capable of generating new high value-added. The role of the state in a new mode of *régulation* was therefore to maintain flexible labour markets and reduce collective bargaining, provide supply-side economic support to the economy, a differentiated welfare provision and a neo-liberal economic strategy. This was premised on free-market growth and flexible exchange rates (Jessop 2002).

The succession of New Labour did not see the reversal of this approach. Rather, New Labour reinforced the importance of competition in the internationalised global economy, a commitment to financial 'prudence' in fiscal policy and depoliticised interest management restraining inflation, in the context of the expanding neo-liberalisation of the EU. Moreover, New Labour further encouraged the development of new knowledge economies as an alternative basis for future economic growth (Fielding 2003, Annesley and Gamble 2004). Hence, according to Jessop, a new post-Fordist regime of accumulation has emerged in the form of the Schumpeterian Workfare Post-National Regime (SWPR) (see Table 1) (Jessop 2002).

Explaining change with the *Régulation* approach

What causes change in the *Régulation* approach? Why should one regime of accumulation be replaced with another? Central to any theory of change is the concept of crisis. Boyer and Saillard (2002b) outline four types of crisis that might occur. At one extreme there are those '*endogenous or cyclical crises*' which are 'minor' in nature and require no modification to the institutional forms for a transition from recession to economic recovery to occur. At the other extreme, '*crises in the dominant mode of production*' underlying the economic system may occur in which no new accumulation regime can emerge since institutional forms cannot adapt and reform

Table 1. Accumulation regimes in post-war Britain.

Distinctive set of economic policies <i>Keynesian</i>	Distinctive set of social policies <i>Welfare</i>	Primary scale (if any) <i>National</i>	Primary means to compensate market failure <i>State</i>
Full employment, demand management, provisions of infrastructure to support mass production and consumption	Collective bargaining and state help generalise norms of mass consumption. Expansion of welfare rights	Relative primacy of national scale in economic and social policy-making with local as well as central delivery	Market and state form a 'mixed economy.' State is expected to compensate for market failure
Crisis of Fordism <i>Schumpeterian</i>	<i>Workfare</i>	<i>Postnational</i>	<i>Regime</i>
Focus on innovation and competition in open economies, with increasing stress in supply-side to promote KBE	Subordinates social policy to an expanded notion of economic policy; download pressure on the 'social wage' and attack on welfare rights	Relativisation of scale at expense of national scale. Competition to establish a new primary scale but continued role of national scale(s)	Increased role of self-organising governance to correct both for market and state failures. But state gains greater role in the exercise of meta-governance

Source: Compiled from Jessop 2002, pp. 59, 252.

to produce successful growth. Examples of this include the crisis of feudalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union (Boyer and Saillard 2002b).

In between these however are '*structural or major crises*' where the compatibility of the institutional forms and the economic dynamic is no longer guaranteed. These require fundamental reform of institutions and the deployment of new economic strategies. The factors that led to 'the crisis of Fordism' are generally seen to constitute an example of a structural or major crisis. Aglietta, for example, claims that the system of Taylorist labour processes were unable to realise further productivity gains which brought about a progressive fall in the average rate of profit. A contributing factor to this was the monotonous nature of the work which led to deskilling and alienation, leading in turn to absenteeism, sloppiness, sabotage and further labour relations problems (Hirsch 1991). The associated corporatist, bureaucratic and centralised system of integrating trade unions and social security was also argued to have become a threat to capitalist profit. In addition the welfare state was claimed to have faced problems achieving 'modernisation' in the face of pressures to reduce taxes to promote international competitive economy and suffered the inefficiencies of over-sized bureaucracies. Others claim that the evolution of international competition from Germany and Japan eroded US hegemony and the stability of the dollar, causing a breakdown of oligopolistic pricing methods and global instability. Growing constraints on the availability of cheap materials due to a crisis in ecology has also meant that capitalist development has had to move into service sectors. However, it is the crisis in production methods that is generally seen as being at the heart of the crisis (Hirsch 1991).

The post-Fordist local state

In the mid-1990s, Stoker and Mossberger used the *Régulation* approach to explain the broad pattern of change in local government in the UK. According to them: 'the post-Fordist literature has a reasonable claim to have most effectively captured the broad complexity of the changes that are occurring in the system of local governance' (Stoker and Mossberger 1995, p. 210). Moreover it was possible to identify a Conservative-inspired 'ideal-type' model of the local state under post-Fordism, as outlined in Table 2.

Importantly, local authorities were adapting to this post-Fordist model at different paces, suggesting that 'the specific dynamics of change require investigation and analysis beyond the boundaries of contemporary regulation theory' (Stoker and Mossberger 1995). In addition to broad trends outlined by the *Régulation* approach there are local push-and-pull factors exerting pressures for change. Policy diffusion was partially forced by the policies of the national government. They noted how the Conservative government operated a 'top-down' implementation model, minimising consultation. Some policy diffusion, however, is the result of learning and voluntary adoption by local authorities. They thus claimed that local authorities can be placed into a typology of local response ranging from 'early adherents' to 'late adopters.' Some of the factors that they identify as affecting the pace of change within the local authority are the socio-economic conditions, the social structure, the political conditions, the values and ideology of the local officialdom and the integration into 'national' networks (Stoker and Mossberger 1995).

To summarise, the *Régulation* approach sees policy change as fundamentally about crisis. In the period leading up to the 1970s, many working within the approach identify a particular crisis in labour processes which was said to constitute a 'crisis of Fordism', meaning that social, economic and political institutions needed to change to create a new regime of accretion for successful capital accumulation to be achieved. The potential utility of *régulation* theory is therefore to explain how local change can be brought about by an external context without making this exogenous to the model. It could provide a more holistic model of change by integrating factors that are often created simply as exogenous to the model by many

Table 2. Characteristics of the post-Fordist local state.

Economic	Social
Supply-side intervention, promoting competition and labour flexibility	Two-tier service provision
Local economic strategies	Constraints on public spending
Attraction of capital and high-income residents	
Private-sector involvement in policy-making	
Political	Managerial
'Networking' and external focus	'New management' thinking
Fragmentation of local governance	Dominance of private-sector methods
European community and transnational influence	

Source: Adapted from Stoker and Mossberger 1995, p. 215.

public policy writers. It also allows theorists to establish the likely causes of past change and prospects for future change through crises and their possible resolutions.

This article therefore seeks to re-deploy the *Régulation* approach and consider its utility for explaining local change in a case study of economic policy in York over a 25-year period. In 1980, York had a strong, superficially 'Fordist' economy with employment concentrated in the chocolate, sugar, glass and railway industry. It also had relatively little local economic strategy. However, by 2005 the economy had diversified considerably, and a range of local economic strategies were in place to further economic growth. To what extent has change been brought about by the *Régulation* approach concept for change, 'crisis'? And what has been the root cause of this crisis? How useful therefore is the *Régulation* approach for understanding change in local government? These are the key questions for analysis. The case of York at least shows that while macro-analysis may be fruitful, there has been no crisis of Fordism. Change appears to have emanated from a global move to neo-liberalism. There are also further analytical issues involved in deploying the *Régulation* approach against local case studies.

As Yin notes, while it is may not be possible to generalise from case study to population, it is from case study to theory (Yin 2003). Case studies can be used to provide in-depth analysis of single instances of phenomena and therefore generate richer and fuller evidence of the dynamics of change than is possible at a macro-level. Case studies can lead to more case studies, which can in turn disprove or prove any findings made here.

The case study is constructed using a variety of research methods. Elite-level interviews were undertaken with key actors in the economic development strategy in York. These included senior council officials and politicians who had been involved in the economic development strategy over the past 20 years, representatives from other agencies including the Regional Economic Development Agency, the Inward Investment Board, key employers in the city, members of the Chamber of Commerce and trade union officials. City of York council minutes and policy documents over a 25-year period were exhaustively consulted. Newspaper archives from the local and national media and socio-economic statistics from the City of York council and the House of Commons Library were also used.

Snapshots and moments in economic development policy in York, 1980–2006

Despite York missing the central early thrust of industrialisation, which transformed the neighbouring cities of Leeds, Bradford, Hull and Sheffield, by the late nineteenth century large-scale manufacturing began to develop in York to provide a Fordist base. York became a national centre for the railways, specialising in carriage production, with the opening of the Carriageworks in 1855. Indeed, by WWII 13% of employment in York was railway-based. York also became renowned for its confectionery industry. Rowntree & Co began producing chocolate in the city in 1862. In 1945, confectionery (Rowntree's and its competitor, Terry's) dominated employment in York at 30% of the insured working population. British Sugar and glass production provided further sources of employment in the city. This strong manufacturing sector remained in place until the 1980s.

What role did the local state play in promoting economic development in city? As one senior councillor comments on the start of the 1980s: 'frankly there were no

economic development mechanisms worth mentioning in those days at all' (private interview). York City District Council had no explicit or co-ordinated economic development strategy. The Department of Development Control contained a Planning Department, which was responsible for planning applications and the demolition of properties: however, this followed a development plan that was written in 1956. Economic development did not appear as an issue on the agenda. It may be possible to assume from this that the national institutions had therefore taken the key role in the management of the economy such that local intervention was not required, except to follow centrally defined planning agreements.

From the early 1980s, a new interest in economic development strategies was created within the council. In March 1982, the City launched an Employment and Economic Sub-Committee (EESC) with an Economic Development Unit (EDU) within the Planning Department to act as the focal point for the economic development activities and promotional work. A first economic development strategy was launched shortly after. This involved measures such as Small Business and Training and Employment Grants to create additional employment, an Enterprise Centre to provide counselling and advise for business ideas, a register to monitor industrial and commercial property enquiries and advanced factory production. A policy review in 1985 led to the council offering financial incentives to inward-moving firms. Parallel to this, an Economic Liaison Committee was set up under the chairmanship of the Lord Mayor in 1984 to consider initiatives to promote employment. A key tenet of the early strategies was to diversify the structure of the economy away from manufacturing.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the council undertook measures to increase tourism in the city via a Tourism Management Sub-Committee, growing a science industry through assistance to the University of York's Science Park, a 'Partnerships for Prosperity Programme' to attract in-moving businesses, the informal approaching of 'high-tech' firms and intensive political campaigning for the railway industry in York. During the mid-1990s, York profited from a Single Regeneration Budget bid to reinvigorate a site where the Carriageworks once stood, which it did by spending money to attract a new carriage-making firm, Thrall Europa.

A central tenet of the strategy became the Science City York project developed from 1997 to give formal expression to a network of public and private-sector interests in developing 'high-tech' industries in York around the clusters of Bioscience, E-Science and Heritage and Arts Technology. This began as a 'self-help group' between interests, but from 1998 roughly £200,000 was spent on the project with some funding from the EU and central government.

A central driver of economic development in the City however from the late 1990s was the Inward Investment Board (IIB) which was established with the aim to attract mobile capital. Uniquely the IIB was established as a stand-alone private company to be funded by the council with a board of three councillors, representatives from the local Chamber of Commerce, English Partnerships and private-sector firms: making elected politicians in the minority on the board. Funding was mostly from the council although some private-sector firms made contributions in kind: such as the secondment of a bank manager to work as a deputy on the board. The IIB was credited with enormous success in bringing in new firms into the city and was thus given an extended remit across the broader sub-region in the economic strategy developed by the Regional Development Agency, Yorkshire Forward. An interest in

tourism continued with the formation of a First Stop York Tourism Partnership from the mid-1990s. This collected together a range of private and public stakeholders to co-ordinate efforts to maximise tourism in the city.

Thus, within a 25-year period, the policy towards economic development had changed considerably in the city. As one senior council official commented in interview:

[Previously] you had a development plan which was written in 1956 . . . but there was no proactive side to it . . . now economic development is seen to be a key, major part of any decision-making in the city. It is not seen to be an adjunct. It is actually involved at the beginning of any process which has implications for jobs. (private interview, senior member of York Economic Development Unit, 1 July 2003)

Factors and currents in the formation of policy 1980–2005

What accounts for this rapid transformation and the development of a local strategy? How insightful are the propositions made within the framework of Régulation theory for explaining change? This section argues that it is possible to differentiate between factors at the local, national and international scales. Ultimately however the root of change has not been the crisis of Fordism, but an acceptance of neo-liberalism. Job losses and the actions of local agents are argued to have emanated from this. The spread of neo-liberalism has created an environment in which international competition has increased. It is also possible, and important, to differentiate between structures and agents in the analysis since local policy-makers have played a key role in defining the response. The section begins with the local, continues with the national and ends with the international factors that have propelled policy evolution. The following section considers how far the Régulation approach explains these.

Local agents and individuals

The case study of policy change in York highlights the role that key individuals, and relationships between individuals, have played in triggering action. As a macro-approach it is unclear how far the Régulation approach helps to explain these individual-level actions. Notably it was one Labour councillor, a university lecturer called Rod Hills, who played a key role in initiating the agenda for economic development policies in York. In 1980, he asked all committees to consider options ‘to promote local employment’ (YCC 1980), which was a trigger to the setting up of the first EESC. He personally called for the initiation of the York City Economic Liaison Committee in January 1984, and interviews with key policy-makers confirmed his influence throughout his time in the council in trying to encourage York to diversify its economy away from a perceived dependence on manufacturing. As early as 1983 he spoke of ‘a crisis situation in the traditional manual employment prospects for York citizens and particularly, their children’ (YCC 1983a). As one senior official commented:

They were New Labour before New Labour was invented and they recognised locally before it became fashionable at a national level that if Labour was going to achieve its social objectives it had to get into bed, or had to form a fresh relationship with business. (private interview, senior member of the IIB, 25 June 2003)

Hills became leader of the council in 1984, for a period of 18 years, and chair of the EEDC for sustained periods of time.

Likewise another key moment in the City policy evolution was the appointment of a new vice-chancellor at the University of York in 1992 who sought to integrate the university into strategies to increase employment in the city. As one university official commented:

We got a new vice-chancellor in 1992/3 and that was a watershed because until then . . . and there was nothing wrong with the previous vice-chancellors. The University had been a bit inward-looking . . . Ron Cooke came in and turned that completely around. (private interview, senior member of the University of York, 15 May 2003)

In particular, this facilitated the growth of a personal relationship between Tony Robards at the university and Tony Bennett, the Director for Economic Development at the council, which many sources concur meant that the university had the ear of the council when other sources of employment were seemingly failing. These ideas were then passed onto the council committees and heavily influenced the council's direction. Thus policy evolution in York cannot be understood without understanding the role of key individuals and personal relationships in York. In short, there did appear choices in short term of policy options, or at least in the timing and extent of reforms. Importantly, the Régulation approach does allow a role for agents and individuals in the process of forming and developing new regimes: however, no information is given about how the decision-making process works at this level.

Key also was the role of individuals at the IBB in the late 1990s. Many sources concurred that Paul Murphy played a key role as chief executive in shaping the city's strategy. The IIB was set an initial target of bringing 1500 jobs to York. By 2002, 60 companies and over 2000 jobs had been brought to York, at least half of which were biotech or IT companies (York Evening Press 2002; private interview, Paul Murphy, 25 June 2003). As a private company the IBB had more flexibility compared to the local council: however, a number of sources confirmed that Murphy appeared to be particularly successful at bringing in new firms and this success ensured that the IBB remained a central driver of the city's strategy and also for the region. The case of Credit Card Protection (CPP) also shows the working flexibility afforded to the IIB because it was a private company. In competition with a rival area that could offer financial assistance, the chief executive of the IIB ran dummy advertisements in the local press asking people to submit CVs for jobs that did not exist to help to prove the quality of the York workforce. As he notes:

It trod an ethical boundary and I had to spend £5000 doing it . . . I did it very quickly so that the adverts were out within a week; the council could never have done that . . . I was able to take the risk and behave in a much more private-sector manner. (private interview, senior member of the IIB, 25 June 2003)

The adverts generated 400 CVs, which eventually brought CPP into York.

Local redundancies

While individuals and local political factors may have led policy change, this cannot be separated from the spate of redundancies that occurred in York from 1980–2005, particularly in the manufacturing and railway industry which contributed towards

any change in ideology. Each of these arguably created political pressure on the council, which meant that some action was required, albeit that there was scope for politicians to define the precise nature of the action. By the early 1990s, York had one of the highest rates of unemployment in country: 18th out of the 651 parliamentary constituencies in the period 1992–1995 (Bevan and Gilroy 2000). Each cluster of major job losses was succeeded by major policy change.

A series of job losses in January 1984 immediately preceded Hills' demands for an Economic Liaison Committee. A total of 280 redundancies had been made at British Rail, 900 workers had been transferred to short-term contracts at the York Carriageworks, and further job losses had been made at Rowntree Mackintosh, the District Health Authority, Terry's and other firms, but most importantly Redfearn's National Glass.

Clearly, the job losses represented an important catalyst for change. As one senior official recalls:

Redfearn's closure was a key moment in getting people to think and focus on the issue of jobs and employment. We needed to have the right image, we needed to have the right strategy, we needed to know where we were going. And all of that was effectively missing ... local plans became much more economy-based. (private interview, senior member of York Economic Development Unit, 1 July 2003)

Later, York suffered considerable job losses at BREL and ABB, owners of the Carriageworks. These developments led to considerable council activity including open letters to the Secretary of State, delegations of councillors meeting ministers, petitions and a 'Rail Forum' to bring together stakeholders. Following the closure, ABB and the council both developed programmes to try to retrain workers but the most considerable programme was the re-development of the Carriageworks site using Single Regeneration Budget money, which, as mentioned above led to the eventual failure of Thrall Europa. York was therefore seeking new sources of employment.

There were considerable job losses in York's chocolate industry. In June 1988, Nestle announced the takeover of the historic Rowntree's factory in York causing jobs losses, and a further 150 redundancies were announced in July 1993. Further losses took place at Terry's. Further considerable job losses included the closure of Monroe's in 2000, leaving 392 unemployed. This trend of redundancies, which occurred most notably in the manufacturing industry, acted as the trigger for change.

National politics and economics

While local redundancies and agents may have acted as the triggers and initiators for policy change, these developments in York cannot be separated from the national and international economic and political context and move to neo-liberalism. A large number of the job losses that occurred in York from the early 1980s to the 2000s could be directly or indirectly linked to the economic policy of the national government. For example, the redundancies suffered in the railway industry were directly attributed by many to the decision of the Thatcher government to privatise the railways. Census data reveals that, up until the 1980s, York had a proportion of the labour force working in the transport industry considerably larger than the national average (Stafford and Barnett 1987), reflecting the long history of the industry in York. However the Conservative government's decision to privatise

BREL, owner of the Carriageworks, announced on 24 November 1987, set in motion a series of events that led to considerable job losses. The eventual sale took the form of a management–employee buy-out with Aesa Brown Boveri (ABB) taking control of four workshops in Crewe, Derby (2) and York. From the early 1980s there have been pockets of redundancies and 700 were announced in 1987. However, these gathered pace under ABB with around 1000 between 1992 and 1995. Most of the redundancies were part of a rationalisation process, with repairs and refurbishment of vehicles moving away from York while some other services such as plan maintenance were contracted out. However privatisation was a major source of uncertainty in the industry and delays and a reduction in the number of orders for new rolling-stock by the government led to the closure of the firm in 1995 (Baybrook 1997).

The broader economic policy of the Conservative government and, later on, the Labour government had a considerable impact upon the direction of policy. Job losses in the manufacturing industry in the early 1980s followed national trends, which were at least partly due to the economic policy of the Thatcher administration. Operating under the ideology of monetarism, the government followed a strict policy of trying to control the money supply and thus raised interest rates and taxes during a recession to control inflation. Unemployment increased to 4 million and by 1983 manufacturing output was 30% less than in 1978 (Jessop *et al.* 1988). In this context manufacturing in York was always likely to struggle and there would always be pressure on local government to react to job losses. Whereas before the national state, operating under a Keynesian doctrine, could intervene by seeking to expand aggregate demand in the economy, the local state no longer had this support, was exposed, and needed to react.

Moreover, the successful victory of Thatcherism and neo-liberalism at a national level through victories over the Labour Party in consecutive elections and ‘successful’ trade union reforms meant that policy options at the local level were limited. The powers and fiscal autonomy of the local government were constrained by consecutive Local Government Acts which placed limits on economic policy leverages.

Importantly, after 1994, the Labour Party increasingly converged its economic policy with the Conservative Party as part of its modernisation agenda. Thus, the party dropped its commitment to nationalisation and increasingly premised strategies for social equality on economic growth generated from an open free-market economy. Therefore, councillors who were in charge of the council were increasingly part of a national party which embraced neo-liberalism. Moreover within the Labour Party there became an emphasis on the development of the ‘knowledge economy.’ This change in ideological currents would have influenced Labour councillors or perhaps even restricted the range of acceptable policy positions. Moreover the granting of independence to the Bank of England in 1997 was argued to have reduced policy options to combat the consequences of a highly-valued pound which was hitting manufacturing nationally. This national economic policy severely constrained options and forced action. Nonetheless, as noted, in many respects Labour councillors in York were pre-emptive of this ideological change in that from 1983 councillors such as Rod Hills promoted the movement to diversify the economy before this reached the national party agenda. In summary, employment in York was severely hit by the national government’s economic policies which were often presented as responses to symptoms of the ‘crisis of Fordism,’ yet

these were often the cause of crisis. These would in turn create pressures for local change.

International economic and political setting

Yet while the national economic and political context is vital for understanding policy change, developments at the local and national spatial level need to be contextualised by international developments since these can be shown to have had a causal effect on local economic policy. A number of important global and international developments can be shown to have had an impact on local economic policy since they contributed towards an increasingly liberal international economy, which was the root cause of local redundancies and therefore policy change. First, the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War contributed towards the proliferation of states in Europe adopting liberal economic policies. These have acted as alternative destinations for capital investment as states seek to attract investment by lowering tax differentials to pull in financiers seeking to maximise profit. Second, the consolidation and expansion of the European Union has been coupled with a broadly neo-liberal economic framework which has sought to reduce transaction costs of trade and capital movement between states through mechanisms such as the single currency and open trade agreements. Third, an increasingly neo-liberal economic system has developed following the collapse of the Bretton Woods system based around flexible exchange rates. This has further encouraged the fluidity capital across globe.

There is considerable evidence that these combined events have had a causal impact upon local economic policy. First, there is evidence that key agents involved in the policy-making process *believed* that this competition from abroad affected their ability to attract certain types of industries to York. This led to pre-emptive moves to avert economic crisis by diversifying the economy to science-based industries. This is confirmed by the interviews with political elites and the consultation reports published by them. Hills, in a council meeting, spoke of ‘a crisis situation in the traditional manual employment ... [affecting] prospects for York citizens’ (York City Council 1983). According to those working within the interpretist framework, it is the ideas of policy-makers that are important since actions are based upon their beliefs.

One key moment in the evolution of economic policy in York was the use by the council of consultants from the Economics Department at the University of York. In 1986, approval was granted to put out to tender a contract to profile the local economy, its strengths and weaknesses and projections for the future (Stafford and Barnett 1987). The report was eventually presented to the committee in October 1987 (York City Council 1987). As one key policy-maker commented:

We developed a forward focus to 2000 ... We looked at the ways in which the economy would evolve in that time without intervention ... the indigenous strengths of York and what we might do for the future. The answer seemed to be based on high-value added ... [industry] ... around the University largely. (private interview, senior member of York Economic Development Unit, 1 July 2003)

The report identified serious structural problems within the York economy with a need to create new businesses to offset job losses in York’s traditional industries,

which were expected to be unable to provide the jobs that were needed. York, claimed the report, was becoming a low-wage economy with an increasing number of part-time jobs, many based around tourism and hospitality. In total a continuing shortfall was expected of around 4500–5000 jobs. A second report was issued by in 1990 that reinforced the analyst's findings (Stafford 1990). These findings were to have a major impact on York's thinking, and were the 'overall context for the Council's policy-making' (York City Council 1992). In summary, the ideological consensus was that York had to diversify in response to the international system.

Second, there is evidence that the impact of these global trends were not simply ideational, but were based on real objective trends. Most of the job losses that occurred in York from 1980–2005 were largely caused by firms relocating outside of the UK to reduce costs. Key examples of firms switching production to Europe have included Terry's Suchard (–94 1995 due to transfer to Belgium), Monroe/Tenneco (–392 due to relocation to Eastern Europe), Thrall Europa (–260 June 2002 due to relocation to Eastern Europe), Terry's (–316 November 2004 due to move to Sweden, Poland and Slovakia) and Nestle Rowntree (–645 September 2006 due to production transfer to Czech Republic). In addition, a more recent trend has been the movement of some service industry jobs to East Asia. These have included Norwich Union (–150 June 2004; –113 July 2006; –450 September 2006 due outsourcing to India) and CPP (–12 March 2006 due to outsourcing to Malaysia). The example of Thrall Europa is particularly insightful. Following the collapse of ABB, the council sought to bring in a new carriage producer onto the old site using money from the Single Regeneration Budget. This was taken by Thrall Europa, but the firm eventually relocated to Eastern Europe. Interviews with members with members of the IBB also confirmed that many potential inward-moving manufacturing firms cited cheaper overseas production costs as reasons for not coming to York. In short, the changing international system (1) created a local crisis which manifested itself in high unemployment. This acted as a considerable catalyst for change. However it also (2) imposed constraints on the type of firms York could seek to bring in.

Analysis

This article has sought to redeploy the *Régulation* approach as a methodology for understanding policy change in local government which was claimed to be so successful in the 1990s by Gerry Stoker and Karen Mossenberger (1995), amongst others. But how effective is the *Régulation* approach at explaining change? Many years on, can it make a useful contribution to the new institutionalist literature?

The strength of the approach appears to be that it provides an account of external sources of policy change. On the surface the concept of major or structural crisis, and in particular the 'crisis of Fordism' espoused by some within the tradition, could account for change on the grounds that it may explain the local redundancies that acted as a trigger for policy change. However, a number of criticisms can be (and have been) levied at the *Régulation* approach as a model for explaining change in local government economic policy and institutions in general. Some of these are justified, some less so, but these help to explain why the *Régulation* approach has dropped from the limelight in recent years and question its utility in its current form at least.

Linking macro and micro-levels of inquiry

One central problem is that while it might superficially help explain the external source of change, it does not provide much of an explanation about the nature of the response by local agents. Why was it that York responded in the particular way that it did? Moreover, why did the national government respond in the way that it did?

The apparent absence of answers to these questions allows space for two lines of criticism. The first is that it lacks the theoretical tools to explain the finer dynamics of change. The *Régulation* approach is effectively a macro-approach focusing on the change within the global and international economic systems. According to Cochrane (1993), as a meta-theory the *Régulation* approach was 'too vague' to explain micro-level change and encouraged a focus on meso-level theories instead. There is much to this line of argument.

One response might be that it could be complemented with other meso and micro-level theories of the policy process which try to explain policy change. Indeed one advantage of the approach may be that it does link macro-level developments into micro-level cases, effectively showing the relationship of structure and agency in the decision-making process, which is sometimes not present in some institutional analysis.

The case of York shows very clearly how local decision-making has to be contextualised by broader changes. This is not to state a 'truism' that context matters. As McAnulla (2002) notes in his discussion of structure and agency, the idea that structures matter is not accepted by everyone. Moreover, the precise way in which structures and agents collide and interact is very much an unresolved debate for institutional analysis. For example Hay (1996), Jessop (2008) and Giddens (1999) all provide different accounts of the way in which structure and agency interrelate. Moreover, it may be that a macro-approach could be usefully complemented alongside micro-level policy analysis. The trap of ignoring macro-development in any analysis of local decision-making is that accounts will become over-compartmentalised and therefore miss the broader context in which decisions are made.

The contribution that local case studies can make to this will always be questioned since critics will claim that they only represent one isolated case. Ultimately these cannot really prove or disprove a macro-approach such as the assumptions of the *Régulation* approach because they do not operate on the same scale. The core assumptions of the *Régulation* approach can only be fully explored by analysis at the macro-level. What local case studies do provide however is, as Yin notes, an extremely effective way to provide in-depth analysis of single instances of a phenomena. They therefore generate richer and fuller evidence of the dynamics of change than is possible at a macro-level (Yin 2003).

Over-determinism

A second line of criticism is that the *Régulation* approach is over-deterministic. Indeed, an important criticism of the approach has always been that it promotes a role for economic structure at the expense of agency by suggesting that political institutions have to respond to the over-determining objective laws of capitalism. They thus reduce the role of class struggle to a 'subordinate factor' (Bonfeld 1991).

With only the broad claim that economic crisis is the cause of change, the approach is left open to the claim of functionalism.

Initial proponents such as Jessop respond to this by claiming that these regimes are not inevitable or automatic but instead require agents to demand and implement change (Jessop 1991). There is nothing inevitable about 'successful' capitalist restructuring in response to crisis and a collapse of capitalism is possible. Multiple alternative capitalist or non-capitalist socio-economic systems remain options. The approach therefore gives a key role to agents and a broader political struggle in determining the changing structures of capitalism and public policy (Jessop 2001). More recently, however, Jessop and others have suggested that the approach should be supplemented by a theory of hegemonic struggles to again overcome this criticism.

Crisis? What crisis?

Perhaps a more considerable problem, however, is that the York case does not appear to support the observation that there was a 'crisis of Fordism' at all. Although York is just one case study and generalisations cannot be made without further research, it does suggest that the cause of change was not a crisis of Fordism, but the 'post-Fordist' response to the 'crisis of Fordism.' The key local causes were the national privatisation of the railways and the movement of firms overseas to cut costs because of increased global neo-liberalism. These factors more closely approximate the characteristics of post-Fordism rather than the symptoms of post-Fordist crisis. If these findings were borne out by further research then there would be some serious implications. Firstly, it would suggest that the role of economic crisis is either (1) inaccurate in the case of Fordism or (2) given too much causal weighting.

Second, it would suggest that state restructuring was not as inevitable as was initially claimed. Indeed Hirst and Thompson (1999), amongst others, were critical of claims that economic restructuring to accommodate neo-liberal principles is inevitable in the light of changing economic conditions. Causal change may derive more from ideological and political struggle amongst elites than any crisis in the forces of production. The study of York contributes, albeit in a small way, to supporting these claims.

Falsifiability

One last criticism that could be made is that the approach lacks a series methodology or series hypotheses through which the Régulation approach can adequately be tested or disproved. The approach is essentially untestable. On the one hand, it suggests that policy and approaches to macro-economic development are determined by an 'inner logic' of capitalism. Yet policy approaches can deviate from this 'inner logic' because a role is also assigned to political struggle and agency at the local level. Thus the claim that changes in the nature of capitalism (such as a 'crisis of Fordism') are unfalsifiable because evidence of an 'inner logic' determining policy shows that the theory is right. However, evidence of policy being determined by other factors also proves that the theory is right since, according to Régulation theory, the 'inner logic' does not determine state action in all instances. The approach appears indestructible.

Is this a fair criticism of the Régulation approach? One response may be that such criticisms are effectively based within a positivist tradition in which 'falsifiability' is at

the heart (Popper 1959). The Régulation approach is, however, effectively premised on different ontological and epistemological changes: namely, critical realism. This suggests that not all phenomena are observable in the sense meant by positivists (Sayer 1992). Different criteria should therefore be put forward to test the approach. One way around this is to suggest that the Régulation approach could be seen as a Kuhnian paradigm. The question then becomes how *useful* the approach is at explaining change (Kuhn 1970).

Conclusions

This article began by pointing out that there remains an ongoing debate on the source of institutional change within political science. It also pointed out a tendency within some approaches to cast change as being exogenous without further explanation. The article has then sought to consider whether the Régulation approach, which has been discarded since the 1990s, can make any useful contribution to explaining local institutional change, by considering the case study of economic development policy in York in the UK. The Régulation approach may superficially be well equipped to explain change by providing a more holistic analysis. Economic policy in York has undergone considerable change, with virtually no economic policy in place in the 1990s whereas in the 2000s the local state is playing a proactive role. The Régulation approach appears to have a number of conceptual qualities. The concept of crisis may be superficially attractive in explaining change at the local level, especially since it is able to locate change into broader economic and political struggles. It highlights the importance of structure and agency in institutional change and locates the importance of broader macro-policy, and therefore does not over-compartmentalise institutional analysis. The use of local case studies can shed light on the dynamics of change at the local level.

However, a number of problems remain which perhaps partially explain its disappearance from the limelight. By itself, the approach provides little information about the finer direction of change and would need to be complemented with other meso or micro-approaches. Indeed, without this it is open to the charge of functionalism. Moreover, the evidence from York casts some doubt on whether the actual cause of change at a national and international level was an ideological and political struggle rather than any local economic crisis and whether the language of ‘crisis of Fordism’ provides a useful discursive rhetoric for political elites to justify unpopular policies.

In short, the application of the Régulation approach to the case study affirms the importance of broader hegemonic political struggles to the study of local government and institutions, and the insights that more holistic analysis can make to the study of institutional change. Approaches based in neo-Marxist political economy may therefore be able to provide insights into policy and institutional change. However, to do so, they would need to be connected to meso and micro-level theories too.

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Notes

1. In addition, at the local level, attention became more focused on regime theory. These, in the tradition of the critical pluralist tradition claimed that local leaders were structurally required to undertake collaborative projects with the private sector in order to generate the sufficient economic growth (Elkin 1987, Stone 1989). However it has also been subject to normative and empirical critique by Davies (2002). According to him: 'it may be more fruitful, for regime theorists to re-engage critically with variants of Marxism, which unlike Structuralism, recognize the possibility of agency' (Davies 2002).
2. Although for an empirical defence of the existence of a Fordist era in Britain see Painter and Goodwin (1993).

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